

Message Text

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SUBJ: CONSULAR AGENT AT CANCUN, QUINTANA ROO

REF: MERIDA 0025, STATE 017931

1. SUMMARY: PRINCIPAL OFFICER VISITED CANCUN FEBRUARY 2 AND 3 AND PERSONALLY INSPECTED ALMOST ALL FACILITATIVE SERVICES PROVIDED BY MEXICAN GOVERNMENT AGENCIES, HOTELS, AND CIVIL AUTHORITIES. MEXICAN DEVELOPMENT AGENCY, FONATUR, WELL AWARE OF DEFICIENCIES AND ENERGETICALLY PROMOTING SERVICES TO MAKE CANCUN A SAFE AND ATTRACTIVE TOURIST AREA. HOTELS ALSO AWARE OF NEED FOR IMPROVEMENT IN SERVICES. HOWEVER, CANCUN IS A DEVELOPMENT IN THE MIDST OF A WILDERNESS WITH ALL SERVICES EITHER VERY BASIC OR IN THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPMENT. MEDICAL, FIRE FIGHTING, RESCUE, TRANSPORTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS SERVICES ALL STILL ARE BASIC AND MUST BE CONSIDERED DEFICIENT TO SUPPORT A TOURIST COMPLEX WHICH EXPECTS 300,000 VISITORS IN 1976. HOTELS CLAIM 85 TO 90 PERCENT OF CLIENTS ARE FROM USA. WHILE THE MEXICAN GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN MOST ACTIVELY PROMOTING TOURISM TO CANCUN, IT HAS NOT SEEN FIT TO ASSIGN A DELEGADO DE TURISMO TO THE AREA. THERE IS, THEREFORE, NO SUPERVISION OF RATES AND SERVICES AND NO PLACE WHERE A TOURIST MAY COMPLAIN OR SEEK REDRESS. DEATHS, PERSONAL INJURY CASES AND PROBLEMS WITH MEXICAN OFFICIALS HAVE BEEN CAUSE OF CONSIDERABLE CONCERN BY THIS CONSULATE OVER PAST 6 MONTHS.

2. PRINCIPAL OFFICER LANDED AT CANCUN'S NEW MODERN INTER-
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NATIONAL JET-PORT IN HIS OWN AIRCRAFT AND WAS DIRECTED TO

THE TIE-DOWN AREA BY THE TOWER. WHILE REFUELING SERVICES WERE READILY AVAILABLE, THERE WERE NO FACILITIES FOR HANDLING BAGGAGE AND WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE ONE TOWER OPERATOR, THE OPERATIONS OFFICE WAS DESERTED. A WALK OF THREE HUNDRED METERS FROM THE PARKING AREA TO THE MAIN TERMINAL WAS NECESSARY TO LOCATE A TELEPHONE AND TRY TO FIND A PORTER TO HANDLE THE LUGGAGE. AFTER A RATHER DILIGENT SEARCH, THE ONE TELEPHONE AT THE AIRPORT WAS LOCATED IN THE OFFICES OF ASA (AEROPUERTOS Y SERVICIOS AUXILIARES). IT TOOK APPROXIMATELY ONE HOUR TO SECURE THE SERVICES OF A PORTER AND TRANSPORTATION INTO TOWN. IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT CANCUN IS BEING PROMOTED IN GENERAL AVIATION CIRCLES AND TRAFFIC OF PRIVATE AIRCRAFT FROM THE USA IS CONSIDERABLE. IN THIS RESPECT THE AIRPORT NEEDS VAST IMPROVEMENT TO EQUATE ITS SERVICES WITH THOSE OF EVEN THE MOST MODEST GENERAL AVIATION AIRPORTS IN THE USA.

3. A BRIEFING SESSION BY GEORGE GLEESON, FONATUR REPRESENTATIVE IN CANCUN, REVEALED THAT HE AND HIS PERSONNEL HAVE ASSUMED DUTIES FAR IN EXCESS OF THEIR ACTUAL RESPONSIBILITIES. THIS HAS BEEN NECESSARY BECAUSE OF THE FAILURE OF THE MEXICAN GOVERNMENT TO ASSIGN A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE MEXICAN TOURIST DEPARTMENT TO CANCUN AND BECAUSE OF THE LACK OF BASIC MUNICIPAL FACILITIES. GLEESON ARRANGED A TOUR OF FACILITIES AS FOLLOWS:

A. MUNICIPALITY: THE TOWN OF CANCUN, DESIGNED TO PROVIDE SERVICES TO THE TOURIST AREA, IS LESS THAN FOUR YEARS OLD AND IN THIS TIME HAS GROWN FROM LESS THAN A THOUSAND PEOPLE TO TWENTY THOUSAND. NONE OF ITS OFFICIALS HAVE HAD PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE.

B. MORTUARY SERVICES: THERE IS ONE FIRM IN TOWN. IT HAS NO EMBALMING SERVICES; THEREFORE ALL BODIES MUST BE SENT TO CHETUMAL, THE STATE CAPITAL OVER 100 MILES TO THE SOUTH, FOR THIS SERVICE. BODIES MUST THEN BE SHIPPED BACK TO CANCUN FOR TRANSPORTATION TO THE USA. MORTUARY CERTIFICATES MUST BE SENT TO THE CONSULATE IN MERIDA FOR SIGNATURE CAUSING A DELAY OF FROM 36 TO 48 HOURS IN SHIPMENT OF THE BODY. THE ONE MORTUARY HAS

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BEEN GUILTY OF PRICE GOUGING IN CASES INVOLVING SEVERAL AMERICANS. THE MUNICIPALITY THEREFORE PLANS TO ESTABLISH ITS OWN MORTUARY WITH FIXED PRICES AND EMBALMING SERVICES. THIS, HOWEVER, IS FOR SOME TIME IN THE FUTURE.

C. FIRE FIGHTING: THE NEAREST EQUIPMENT IS LOCATED AT THE INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, SOME 25 KILOMETERS FROM THE TOURIST AREA. A NEW FIRE STATION IS UNDER CONSTRUCTION IN

THE TOWN, BUT WHEN A TRAINED SERVICE WITH EQUIPMENT WILL BE AVAILABLE IS UNKNOWN.

D. HOSPITAL AND FIRST AID FACILITIES: ALL IS VERY RUDIMENTARY AND ENTIRELY INADEQUATE TO SUPPORT A MODERN TOURIST COMPLEX. ONLY 6 DOCTORS ARE IN THE AREA. THE MEXICAN RED CROSS ORGANIZATION HAS TWO SO-CALLED AMBULANCES FOR ACCIDENT CASES. ONE IS RADIO EQUIPPED, BUT NEITHER HAVE ABOARD MORE THAN A STRETCHER AND ELEMENTARY FIRST AID EQUIPMENT. CURRENTLY NO DOCTORS ARE ASSIGNED TO THE RED CROSS UNIT ALTHOUGH FONATUR CLAIMS THERE ARE PLANS TO HAVE TWO FULL TIME PHYSICIANS SO ASSIGNED. THE MEXICAN GOVERNMENT SOCIAL SECURITY SERVICES IN DECEMBER 1975 COMPLETED A HOSPITAL IN CANCUN. IT IS, HOWEVER, VERY BASIC AND ITS MEDICAL STAFF IS VERY LIMITED. THE MEDICAL OFFICER IN CHARGE STATED THAT THEY HAVE NO INTENSIVE CARE UNIT NOR THE STAFF OR FACILITIES EVEN TO HANDLE SERIOUS FRACTURES. EVEN REPTURED APPENDIX CASES ARE BUNDLED OFF TO MERIDA. IN ADDITION, WHILE THE HOSPITAL WILL ATTEMPT TO HANDLE EMERGENCY CASES INVOLVING TOURISTS, THE PRINCIPAL OFFICER WAS REMINDED BY THE DIRECTOR THAT THEIR SERVICES LEGALLY ARE FOR MEXICAN PARTICIPANTS IN THE SOCIAL SECURITY SYSTEM ONLY. UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES ALL SERIOUS MEDICAL CASES SHOULD BE EVACUATED BY AIR TO THE NEAREST US POINT, PROBABLY MIAMI. THIS WOULD BE NO LESS TRAUMATIC THAN THE TRIP TO MERIDA, 200 MILES AWAY, WHERE FACILITIES ALSO ARE QUESTIONABLE.

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ACTION SCSE-00

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E. COMMUNICATIONS: TELEPHONES ARE RARE COMMODITY IN CANCUN AND IT IS EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TO COMMUNICATE IN OR OUT

OF THE AREA. FONATUR, THE THREE BANKS AND SOME PRIVATE BUSINESSES AND HOTELS DO HAVE, HOWEVER, PRIVATE RADIO COMMUNICATIONS WITH THEIR HEADQUARTERS IN MEXICO CHARGE FOR THE TOURIST MAKING A PHONE CALL TO THE LOCAL AIRLINE OR BACK TO THE USA THIS STILL REMAINS A TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCE. THERE IS NO TELEX IN CANCUN AND APPARENTLY LITTLE HOPE OF INSTALLING ANY IN THE NEAR FUTURE.

F. SWIMMING SAFEGUARDS: A RECENT DROWNING DEATH OF A USCIT FORTY YARDS IN FRONT OF ONE OF THE MAJOR HOTELS HAS BROUGHT THIS ISSUE TO THE FORE. THERE IS NO LIFEGUARD SERVICE AT CANCUN NOR ANY PATROL BOATS TO SUPERVISE RECREATIONAL WATER ACTIVITIES. FONATUR CLAIMS BOTH SERVICES ARE IN THE PLANNING STAGE. HOTELS DO, HOWEVER, HAVE SIGNS PROCLAIMING THE RELATIVE SAFETY OF THE WATERS FOR SWIMMING WITH LITTLE GREEN, YELLOW OR RED FLAGS DISPLAYED. HOWEVER, IT WAS NOTED THAT ALL HOTELS HAD THE RED FLAG DISPLAYED ALTHOUGH THERE WAS BARELY A RIPPLE ON THE WATERS. SEVERAL HOTELS ATTENDANTS STATED THAT THE WARNINGS WERE CHANGED RATHER IRREGULARLY AND SOMETIMES IGNORED ALTOGETHER. ALTHOUGH THERE WERE LARGE NUMBERS OF SNORKLERS AND SCUBA DIVERS IN THE AREA, NO WARNING FLAGS ON THE WATER TO MARK THEIR ACTIVITIES WERE OBSERVED.

G. BANKING FACILITIES: BRANCH REPRESENTATIVES OF THREE LARGE AND WELL KNOWN MEXICAN BANKS ARE ESTABLISHED IN THE TOWN OF CANCUN AND NO COMPLAINTS HAVE BEEN RECEIVED REGARDING

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THEIR ACTIVITIES. ALL HAVE RADIO COMMUNICATIONS WITH THEIR MAIN OFFICES. HOWEVER, REPLACEMENT OF LOST AND STOLEN TRAVELERS CHECKS IS A PROBLEM. FOR EXAMPLE, THERE IS NO REPRESENTATIVE OF AMERICAN EXPRESS IN CANCUN.

H. SECURITY: THE LOCAL POLICE HAVE THREE VEHICLES WHICH THEY CLAIM TO BE RADIO EQUIPPED, BUT FOR SOME REASON NONE WAS AVAILABLE FOR INSPECTION. ALL MAJOR HOTELS HAVE THEIR OWN SECURITY FORCES FOR INSPECTION. BUT EVEN FONATUR REPRESENTATIVE STATED THEFTS FROM HOTEL ROOMS WERE NOT UNCOMMON. HE THOUGHT, HOWEVER, THAT THIS PROBLEM WAS WORLDWIDE. LOCAL JAIL, WHILE VERY NEW, WAS PRETTY GRIM WITH NO BEDS OR HAMMOCKS PROVIDED. AREA SURROUNDING CANCUN IS VERY PRIMITIVE AND TOURISTS ARE WARNED NOT TO CAMP OUTSIDE OF AN ESTABLISHED TRAILER PARK. (ONE HUNDRED TRAILERS OF AN ESTABLISHED US TOURING AGENCY ARRIVED IN CANCUN ON FEB 2 AND WERE DIRECTED TO THE OLD AIRPORT AREA WHERE ONLY LIMITED WATER AND POWER FACILITIES WERE AVAILABLE. NO REGULAR HOOK-UP FACILITIES FOR TRAILERS ARE AVAILABLE IN CANCUN.)

4. PRINCIPAL OFFICER, IN CONVERSATIONS WITH US TOURISTS, HEARD

MANY COMPLAINTS, MOST OF WHICH WERE CENTERED AROUND LACK OF CONTROL OF PRICES, POOR SERVICE, UNFULFILLED CONTRACTS FOR RESERVATIONS, LACK OF COOPERATION BY LOCAL OFFICIALS AND ALLEGATIONS OF A QTE RIP-OFF UNQTE MENTALITY ON PART OF MANY HOTELS AND OTHER FACILITIES.

5. OPERATORS CLAIM BIGGEST PROBLEMS CENTER AROUND INABILITY TO SECURE COMPETENT HELP AND ONE MANAGER STATED HE HAD A TURNOVER RATE OF 185 PERCENT OVER PAST SIX MONTHS. HOTEL MANAGEMENT ALSO COMPLAINED THAT MEXICAN GOVERNMENT (FONATUR) OVERSOLD CANCUN IN ITS PROMOTION BY ADVERTISING ALL FACILITIES AVAILABLE WHEN IN FACT THEY HAVE NOT BEEN COMPLETED THUS GIVING TOURISTS MUCH ROOM TO COMPLAIN THAT THEY ARE PAYING LUXURY PRICES FOR LITTLE IN RETURN. LACK OF A REPRESENTATIVE OF MEXICAN OFFICE OF TOURISM WAS CONSTANTLY CITED AS A SERIOUS DEFICIENCY.

6. CONSTRUCTION IS STILL A HAZARD AT CANCUN. SEVERAL SERIOUS ACCIDENT CASES STILL ARE PENDING SETTLEMENT AND ACCORDING TO FONATUR NONE OF CONTRACTORS CARRY LIABILITY INSURANCE. IT WAS SUGGESTED A GROUP LIABILITY POLICY FOR ALL CONTRACTORS AND UNCLASSIFIED

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HOTELS BE SOUGHT. PRINCIPAL OFFICER WHILE DRIVING RENTAL CAR ALMOST BECAME VICTIM OF CONSTRUCTION HAZARD AT HOTEL WHERE MANAGER, INSPITE OF BEING INVOLVED IN THREE DEATHS AND A SERIOUS ACCIDENT CASE, LEFT UNGUARDED AND UNMARKED A TWO FOOT DROP OFF ONE END OF THE DRIVEWAY TO THE HOTEL. CONSTRUCTION TRUCKS RUN THROUGH MAIN TOURIST AREAS AT UNREASONABLE SPEEDS AND BUSES PROVIDED FOR TOURIST SERVICES ARE OLD, UNRELIABLE AND UNCOMFORTABLE.

7. AS STATED IN PREVIOUS TELEGRAM ON SUBJECT, CONSULATE HAS RECEIVED NUMEROUS SERIOUS COMPLAINTS REGARDING CANCUN. FOUR RECENT DEATHS ALSO RAISED SERIOUS PROBLEMS AS HAVE ACCIDENTS AND INJURIES TO USCITS. LACK OF COMMUNICATIONS AND FACILITIES AS DESCRIBED ABOVE COMPLICATE MATTERS AND TURN EACH CASE INTO A MAJOR PROJECT FOR ALL CONCERNED, MANAGEMENT WELL AWARE OF DEFICIENCIES AND WOULD WELCOME US CONSULAR AGENT-PARTICULARLY AT THIS STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT. AT LEAST FOUR WELL QUALIFIED CANDIDATES ARE AVAILABLE AND CONSULATE UREES APPROVAL FOR THIS POSITION AT AN EARLY DATE. ASHFORD

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